Extract

From Stephens' "Incidents of Travel in Central America."

"As at Copan, it was my business to prepare the different objects for Mr. Catherwood to draw. Many of the stones had to be scrubbed and cleaned; and as it was our object to have the utmost possible accuracy in the drawings, in many places scaffolds were to be erected on which to set up the camera lucida. Pawling relieved me from a great part of this labour. That the reader may know the character of the objects we had to interest us, I proceed to give a description of the building in which we lived, called the palace.

A front view of this building is given in the engraving. It does not, however, purport to be given with the same accuracy as the other drawings, the front being in a more ruined condition. It stands on an artificial elevation of an oblong form, forty feet high, three hundred and ten feet in front and rear, and two hundred and sixty feet on each side. This elevation was formerly faced with stone, which has been thrown down by the growth of trees, and its form is hardly distinguishable.

The building stands with its face to the east, and measures two hundred and twenty-eight feet front by one hundred and eighty feet deep. Its height is not more than twenty-five feet, and all around it had a broad projecting cornice of stone. The front contained fourteen doorways, about nine feet wide each, and the intervening piers are between six and seven feet wide. On the left (in approaching the palace) eight of the piers have fallen down, as has also the corner on the right, and the terrace underneath is cumbered with the ruins. But six piers remain entire, and the rest of the front is open.

The engraving opposite represents the ground-plan of the whole. The black lines represent walls still standing; the tint lines indicate remains only, but, in general, so clearly marked that there was no difficulty in connecting them together.

The building was constructed of stone with a mortar of lime and sand, and the whole front was covered with stucco and painted. The piers were ornamented with spirited figures in bas-relief, one of which is represented in the engraving opposite. On the top, are three hieroglyphics sunk in the stucco. It is enclosed by a richly ornamented border, about ten feet high and six wide, of which only a part now remains. The principal personage stands in an upright position and in profile, exhibiting an extraordinary facial angle of about forty-five degrees. The upper part of the head seems to have been compressed and lengthened, perhaps by the same process employed upon the heads of the Choctaw and Flathead Indians of our own country. The head represents a different species from any now existing in that region of country; and supposing the statues to be images of living personages, or the creation of artists according to their ideas of perfect figures, they indicate a race of people now lost and unknown. The head dress is evidently a plume of feathers. Over the shoulders is a short covering decorated with studs, and a breastplate; part of the ornament of the girdle is broken; the tunic is probably a leopard's skin; and the whole dress no doubt exhibits the costume of this unknown people. He holds in his hand a staff or sceptre, and opposite his hands are the marks of three hieroglyphics, which have decayed or been broken off. At his feet are two naked figures seated cross-legged, and apparently supplicants. A fertile imagination might find many explanations for these strange figures, but no satisfactory interpretation presents itself to my mind. The hieroglyphics doubtless tell its history. The stucco is of admirable consistency, and hard as stone. It was painted, and in different places about it we discovered the remains of red, blue, yellow, black, and white.

The piers which are still standing contained other figures of the same general character, but which, unfortunately, are more mutilated, and from the declivity of the terrace it was difficult to set up the camera lucida in such a position as to draw them. The piers which are fallen were no doubt enriched with the same ornaments. Each one had some specific
meaning, and the whole probably presented some allegory or history; and when entire and painted, the effect in ascending the terrace must have been imposing and beautiful.

The principal doorway is not distinguished by its size or by any superior ornament, but is only indicated by a range of broad stone steps leading up to it on the terrace. The doorways have no doors, nor are there the remains of any. Within, on each side, are three niches in the wall, about eight or ten inches square, with a cylindrical stone about two inches in diameter fixed upright, by which perhaps a door was secured. Along the cornice outside, projecting about a foot beyond the front, holes were drilled at intervals through the stone; and our impression was, that an immense cotton cloth, running the whole length of the building, perhaps painted in a style corresponding with the ornaments, was attached to this cornice, and raised and lowered like a curtain, according to the exigencies of sun and rain. Such a curtain is used now in front of the piazzas of some haciendas in Yucatan.

The tops of the doorways were all broken. They had evidently been square, and over every one were large niches in the wall on each side, in which the lintels had been laid. These lintels had all fallen, and the stones above formed broken natural arches. Underneath were heaps of rubbish, but there were no remains of lintels. If they had been single slabs of stone, some of them must have been visible and prominent; and we made up our minds that these lintels were of wood. We had no authority for this. It is not suggested either by Del Rio or Captain Dupaix, and perhaps we should not have ventured the conclusion but for the wooden lintel which we had seen over the doorway at Ocosingo; and by what we saw afterward in Yucatan, we were confirmed, beyond all doubt, in our opinion: I do not conceive, however, that this gives any conclusive data in regard to the age of the buildings. The wood, if such as we saw in the other places, would be very lasting; its decay must have been extremely slow, and centuries may have elapsed since it perished altogether.

The building has two parallel corridors running lengthwise on all four of its sides. In front these corridors are about nine feet wide, and extend the whole length of the building upward of two hundred feet. In the long wall that divides them there is but one door, which is opposite the principal door of entrance, and has a corresponding one on the other side, leading to a courtyard in the rear. The floors are of cement, as hard as the best seen in the remains of Roman baths and cisterns. The walls are about ten feet high, plastered, and on each side of the principal entrance ornamented with medallions, of which the borders only remain; these perhaps contained the busts of the royal family. The separating-wall had apertures of about a foot, probably intended for purposes of ventilation. Some were of this form ∞, and some of this cap, which has been called the Greek Cross and the Egyptian Tau, and made the subject of much learned speculation.

The ceiling of each corridor was in this form ∩. The builders were evidently ignorant of the principles of the arch, and the support was made by stones lapping over as they rose, as at Ocosingo, and among the Cyclopean remains in Greece and Italy. Along the top was a layer of flat stone, and the sides, being plastered, presented a flat surface. The long, unbroken corridors in front of the palace were probably intended for lords and gentlemen in waiting; or perhaps, in that beautiful position, which before the forest grew up, must have commanded an extended view of a cultivated and inhabited plain, the king himself sat in it to receive the reports of his officers and to administer justice. Under our dominion Juan occupied the front corridor as a kitchen, and the other was our sleeping apartment.

From the centre door of this corridor a range of stone steps thirty feet long leads to a rectangular courtyard, eighty feet long by seventy broad. On each side of the steps are grim and gigantic figures, carved on stone in baso-relievo nine or ten feet high, and in a position slightly inclined backward from the end of the steps to the floor of the corridor. The engraving opposite represents the side of the courtyard, and the one next following shows the figures alone, on a larger scale. They are adorned with rich headresses and necklaces, but their attitude is that of pain and trouble. The design and anatomical proportions of the figures are faulty, but there is a force of expression about them which shows the
skill and conceptive power of the artist. When we first took possession of the palace this courtyard was encumbered with trees, so that we could hardly see across it, and it was so filled up with rubbish that we were obliged to make excavations of several feet before these figures could be drawn.

On each side of the courtyard the palace was divided into apartments, probably for sleeping. On the right the piers have all fallen down. On the left they are still standing, and ornamented with stucco figures. In the centre apartment in one of the holes before referred to of the arch, are the remains of a wooden pole about a foot long, which once stretched across, but the rest had decayed. It was the only piece of wood we found at Palenque, and we did not discover this until some time after we had made up our minds in regard to the wooden lintels over the doors. It was much worm-eaten, and probably, in a few years, not a vestige of it will be left.

At the farther side of the courtyard was another flight of stone steps, corresponding with those in front, on each side of which are carved figures, and on the flat surface between are single cartouches of hieroglyphics. The plate opposite represents this side.

The whole courtyard was overgrown with trees, and it was encumbered with ruins several feet high, so that the exact architectural arrangements could not be seen. Having our beds in the corridor adjoining, when we woke in the morning, and when we had finished the work of the day, we had it under our eyes. Every time we descended the steps the grim and mysterious figures stared us in the face, and it became to us one of the most interesting parts of the ruins. We were exceedingly anxious to make excavations, clear out the mass of rubbish, and lay the whole platform bare; but this was impossible. It is probably paved with stone or cement; and from the profusion of ornaments in other parts, there is reason to believe that many curious and interesting specimens may be brought to light. This agreeable work is left for the future traveller, who may go there better provided with men and materials, and with more knowledge of what he has to encounter; and, in my opinion, if he finds nothing new, the mere spectacle of the courtyard entire will repay him for the labour and expense of clearing it.

The part of the building which forms the rear of the courtyard, communicating with it by the steps, consists of two corridors, the same as the front, paved, plastered, and ornamented with stucco. The floor of the corridor fronting the courtyard sounded hollow, and a breach had been made in it which seemed to lead into a subterraneous chamber; but in descending, by means of a tree with notches cut in it, and with a candle, we found merely a hollow in the earth, not bounded by any wall.

In the farther corridor the wall was in some places broken, and had several separate coats of plaster and paint. In one place we counted six layers, each of which had the remains of colours. In another place there seemed a line of written characters in black ink. We made an effort to get at them; but, in endeavouring to remove a thin upper stratum, they came off with it, and we desisted.

This corridor opened upon a second courtyard, eighty feet long and but thirty across. The floor of the corridor was ten feet above that of the courtyard, and on the wall underneath were square stones with hieroglyphics sculptured upon them. On the piers were stuccoed figures, but in a ruined condition.

On the other side of the courtyard were two ranges of corridors, which terminated the building in this direction. The first of them is divided into three apartments, with doors opening from the extremities upon the western corridor. All the piers are standing except that on the northwest corner. All are covered with stucco ornaments, and one with hieroglyphics. The rest contain figures in bas-relief, three of which, being those least ruined, are represented in the opposite plates.

The first was enclosed by a border, very wide at the bottom, part of which is destroyed. The subject consists of two figures with facial angles similar to that in the plate before given, plumes of feathers and other decorations for headdresses, necklaces, girdles, and sandals; each has hold of the same curious baton, part of which is destroyed, and opposite their hands are hieroglyphics, which probably give the history of these incomprehensible personages. The others are more ruined, and no attempt has been made to restore them. One is kneeling as if to
receive an honour, and the other a blow.

So far the arrangements of the palace are simple and easily understood; but on the left are several distinct and independent buildings, as will be seen by the plan, the particulars of which, however, I do not consider it necessary to describe. The principal of these is the tower, on the south side of the second court. This tower is conspicuous by its height and proportions, but on examination in detail it is found unsatisfactory and uninteresting. The base is thirty feet square, and it has three stories. Entering over a heap of rubbish at the base, we found within another tower, distinct from the outer one, and a stone staircase, so narrow that a large man could not ascend it. The staircase terminates against a dead stone ceiling, closing, all farther passage, the last step being only six or eight inches from it. For what purpose a staircase was carried up to such a bootless termination we could not conjecture. The whole tower was a substantial stone structure, and in its arrangements and purposes about as incomprehensible as the sculptured tablets.

East of the tower is another building with two corridors, one richly decorated with pictures in stucco, and having in the centre the elliptical tablet represented in the engraving opposite. It is four feet long and three wide, of hard stone set in the wall, and the sculpture is in bas-relief. Around it are the remains of a rich stucco border. The principal figure sits cross-legged on a couch ornamented with two leopards' heads; the attitude is easy, the physiognomy the same as that of the other personages, and the expression calm and benevolent. The figure wears around its neck a necklace of pearls, to which is suspended a small medallion containing a face; perhaps intended as an image of the sun. Like every other subject of sculpture we had seen in the country, the personage had earrings, bracelets on the wrists, and a girdle round the loins. The headdress differs from most of the others at Palenque in that it wants the plumes of feathers. Near the head are three hieroglyphics.

The other figure, which seems that of a woman, is sitting cross-legged on the ground, richly dressed, and apparently in the act of making an offering. In this supposed offering is seen a plume of feathers, in which the headdress of the princi-

pal person is deficient. Over the head of the sitting personage are four hieroglyphics. This is the only piece of sculptured stone about the palace except those in the courtyard. Under it formerly stood a table, of which the impression against the wall is still visible, and which is given in the engraving in faint lines, after the model of other tables still existing in other places.

At the extremity of this corridor there is an aperture in the pavement, leading by a flight of steps to a platform; from this a door, with an ornament in stucco over it, opens by another flight of steps upon a narrow, dark passage, terminating in other corridors, which run transversely. These are called subterraneous apartments; but there are windows opening from them above the ground, and, in fact, they are merely a ground-floor below the pavement of the corridors. In most parts, however, they are so dark that it is necessary to visit them with candles. There are no bas-reliefs or stucco ornaments; and the only objects which our guide pointed out or which attracted our attention, were several stone tables, one crossing and blocking up the corridor, about eight feet long, four wide, and three high. One of these lower corridors had a door opening upon the back part of the terrace, and we generally passed through it with a candle to get to the other buildings. In two other places there were flights of steps leading to corridors above. Probably these were sleeping apartments.

The foregoing extract has been made to assist the Latter-Day Saints, in establishing the Book of Mormon as a revelation from God. It affords great joy to have the world assist us to so much proof, that even the most credulous cannot doubt. We are sorry that we could not afford the expense to give the necessary cuts referred to in the original.

Let us turn our subject, however, to the Book of Mormon, where these wonderful ruins of Palenque are among the mighty works of the Nephites—and the mystery is solved.

On the 72d page of the third and fourth edition of the Book of Mormon it reads as follows: And it came to pass that we began to prosper exceedingly, and to multiply in the land. And I, Nephi, did take the sword of Laban, and after the manner of it did make many swords, and by any means the people who were now called Lamanites, should come upon us and destroy us; for I knew their hatred towards us
and my children, and those who were called my people. And I did teach my people, to build buildings: and to work in all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores, which were in great abundance. And I, Nephi, did build a temple; and I did construct it after the manner of the temple of Solomon, save it were not built of so many precious things: for they were not to be found upon the land; wherefore, it could not be built like unto Solomon's temple. But the manner of the construction was like unto the temple of Solomon; and the workmanship thereof was exceeding fine. And on page 290-1 is a full description of the Isthmus.

Mr. Stephens' great developments of antiquities are made bare to the eyes of all the people by reading the history of the Nephites in the Book of Mormon. They lived about the narrow neck of land, which now embraces Central America, with all the cities that can be found. Read the destruction of cities at the crucifixion of Christ, pages 459-60. Who could have dreamed that twelve years would have developed such incontrovertible testimony to the Book of Mormon! surely the Lord worketh and none can hinder.

HISTORY OF JOSEPH SMITH.
Continued.

Meantime we continued to translate, at intervals, when not necessitated to attend to the numerous enquirers, that now began to visit us; some for the sake of finding the truth, others for the purpose of putting hard questions, and trying to confound us. Among the latter class were several learned priests who generally came for the purpose of disputation: however the Lord continued to pour out upon us his Holy Spirit, and as often as we had need, he gave us in that moment what to say; so that although unlearned, and inexperienced in religious controversies, yet were we able to confound those learned Rabbis of the day, whilst at the same time, we were enabled to convince the honest in heart, that we had obtained (through the mercy of God) to the true and everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ, so that almost daily we administered the ordinance of baptism for the remission of sins, to such as believed. We now became anxious to have that promise realized to us, which the angel that conferred upon us the Aaronic Priesthood had given us, viz: that provided we continued faithful we should also have the Melchisedec Priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We had for some time made this matter a subject of humble prayer, and at length we got together in the chamber of Mr. Whitmer's house in order more particularly to seek of the Lord what we now so earnestly desired: and here to our unspeakable satisfaction did we realize the truth of the Saviour's promise; "Ask, and you shall receive, seek, and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you:" for we had not long been engaged in solemn and fervent prayer, when the word of the Lord came unto us in the chamber, commanding us; that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an elder in the church of Jesus Christ, and that he also should ordain me to the same office, and then to ordain others as it should be made known unto us, from time to time: we were however commanded to defer this our ordination until, such times, as it should be practicable to have our brethren, who had been and who should be baptized, assembled together, when we must have their sanction to our thus proceeding to ordain each other, and have them decide by vote whether they were willing to accept us as spiritual teachers, or not, when also we were commanded to bless bread and break it with them, and to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them, afterward proceed to ordain each other according to commandment, then call out such men as the spirit should dictate, and ordain them, and then attend to the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, upon all those whom we had previously baptized; doing all things in the name of the Lord.

The following commandment will further illustrate the nature of our calling to this Priesthood as well as that of others who were yet to be sought after.

Revelation to Joseph Smith, Jr. Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, making known the calling of twelve apostles in these last days, and also, instructions relative to building up the church of Christ, according to the fulness of the gospel: Green in Fayette, New York, June, 1829.

Now behold, because of the thing which you, my servant Oliver Cowdery, have desired to know of me, I give unto you these words: behold I have manifested unto you, by my Spirit in many instan-